

Community Liaison Committee Meeting
Thursday, May 30, 2013
American University – School of International Service – Founders Room
7 p.m.

Introduction

The meeting of the Community Liaison Committee (CLC) was opened by AU Vice President of Campus Life Gail Hanson, who convenes and leads the meetings for American University. She opened the meeting at 7 p.m. by welcoming representatives of neighborhood organizations and local Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs). She also thanked those who submitted additional items for the agenda.

She then introduced Dr. William (Billy) Walker, AU's new Athletics Director. He served previously as the deputy director of athletics at the United States Air Force Academy.

David Dower, AU's new Assistant Vice President of Planning & Project Management, then introduced himself. He recently replaced Jorge Abud who retired in April.

Attendees introduced themselves and stated their affiliations.

Construction Update

David Dower provided an update on construction projects currently under way, as well as those in the planning phase.

Cassell Hall: The building's interior and exterior fit-out are under way and occupancy is planned for August of this year.

Jeffrey Kraskin, of the Spring Valley/Wesley Heights Citizens Association, asked if stone would be used all the way up the corner of the building that faces Wesley Seminary, as outlined in the project's original design.

Jerry Gager, University Architect, replied that it will be soon and that the photo used depicted a work in progress.

Alan Pollock, representing the Ft. Gaines Citizens Association, asked when electricity will be connected to the building and if the top floor would glow at night and be visible to the surrounding neighborhood.

David Dower advised that electricity will be connected in the next couple of weeks and that building's windows will filter light coming into and out of the building and, as a result, it should not be an issue.

Dennis Paul, of Neighbors for a Livable Community and the Spring Valley/Wesley Heights Citizens Association, asked if the building's service door will be glass.

Jerry Gager replied that the door's material will be an attractive frosted, tempered glass.

Nebraska Hall: The addition's interior and exterior fit-out are under way and occupancy is planned for August of this year. The water service connection will take place in the coming weeks, which will involve opening up Nebraska Avenue to connect to the city's water line. If any private residences are affected, DC Water will make notification 48-hours before any outage.

Alan Pollock requested that the Ft. Gaines Citizens Association be notified in advance when the building's rear entrance will be utilized.

Kent Slowinski, of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D, asked if any neighbors will lose water during this work.

Linda Argo, AU Assistant Vice President for External Relations & Auxiliary Services, advised that outages will more likely take place right on Nebraska Avenue and affect institutional buildings such as NBC, DHS, and the Presbyterian church.

4401 Connecticut Avenue, NW (new home of WAMU): Occupancy of the building will begin in a couple of days and will be phased over several weeks through the summer. All occupants will be in the building by August with WAMU broadcasting at the new location in September.

Dennis Paul asked if there is going to be retail on the building's first floor.

David Dower responded that, in addition to studio space, both the existing UPS and Subway will remain.

Washington College of Law: A pre-construction meeting with neighbors was held previously and Whiting-Turner, the project contractor, has developed a very robust construction mitigation plan. In June, Tenley campus buildings will be cleared of any environmental issues, which will be followed by demolition and then excavation. A groundbreaking is scheduled for June 12 at 4 p.m.

Judy Chesser, of the Tenleytown Neighborhood Association, asked where one can see the construction mitigation plan and if construction vehicles will be parking on neighborhood streets.

David Dower advised that no private or construction vehicles will be parking on neighborhood streets, but rather inside the construction site.

Andrew Huff, AU Director of Community Relations, agreed to email additional information on the construction mitigation plan.

Linda Argo updated the group on DDOT's traffic calming efforts on 42nd Street. She stated that after bringing their design plans up to 65 percent and conducting a field visit, DDOT decided that the mini traffic circles were no longer feasible and now are looking at viable alternatives.

Gregory Ferenbach, of the Tenley Campus Neighborhood Association, suggested that AU press DDOT to move forward with the traffic calming measures right away.

Linda Argo replied that AU has been doing that all along and only recently received word that there was a change in DDOT's plans.

Alan Pollock asked how many blocks would receive traffic calming measures.

Gregory Ferenbach responded three or four blocks.

Linda Argo stated that this conversation with DDOT continues and that AU will be working with them to set up a community meeting as soon as possible.

David Fehrmann, of the Westover Place Homeowners Association, asked if there was any change in the East Campus construction schedule.

David Dower responded that there is no change at this time and that construction will begin in the summer of 2014. He advised that the project team is being assembled now and that more information will be presented at the next meeting of the CLC.

Student Conduct

Michelle Espinosa, AU Associate Dean of Students, updated the CLC on the most recent data related to student conduct referrals and calls to AU Public Safety and the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) for student behavior issues.

Tom Smith, of Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D and the Spring Valley/Wesley Heights Citizens Association, asked if there was any way to determine overlapping reports of calls to AU Public Safety and MPD.

Michelle Espinosa replied that there is not, as sometimes residents call MPD and sometimes they call AU Public Safety.

Tom Smith asked if she could offer advice on who residents should call to report student misconduct and if there is a preference for calling AU Public Safety.

Michelle Espinosa responded that residents should call both MPD and AU Public Safety if possible and advised that reports also can be made online or via email.

Judy Chesser asked if AU orientation includes information on students' responsibilities as neighbors.

Michelle Espinosa answered that this information is shared with students both at orientation, as well as over the course of their studies at AU, including via workshops and written materials and in formal and informal venues throughout the year.

Gail Hanson reported to the group that AU has been working to ensure rental properties which house students are licensed and inspected properly by the District.

Andrew Huff added that more than 20 properties have been brought into compliance through a partnership between AU and the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA), helping to ensure student safety and proper housing conditions.

Kent Slowinski reported conversations on local list serves regarding an AU fraternity looking for rental property on Arizona Terrace, NW, and asked if anything can be done to prevent them from renting in the neighborhood.

Michelle Espinosa replied that AU cannot dictate where students live but that in this particular case, the university was proactive by determining who was looking at the house and alerting these students that we were aware of their intentions. The fraternity later decided not to rent this property. She added that she often reaches out to students and landlords before problems arise to make expectations clear and recommended that residents report any addresses of concern directly to her.

Kent Slowinski asked if student addresses can be shared with the ANC and civic associations.

Michelle Espinosa responded that privacy issues prevent AU from sharing specific student addresses and again asked members to notify her directly about any problem properties.

Kent Slowinski then asked about the recent TKE hazing incident and reported that hazing has taken place in parks such as Battery-Kimball forcing neighbors to clean up trash and debris.

Michelle Espinosa advised that AU takes hazing very seriously and that the university effectively handled the TKE situation, which resulted in the closing of the AU chapter. She asked neighbors to report any suspicious behavior to MPD and AU Public Safety.

Kent Slowinski asked if AU could send a letter to fraternities asking them to report any upcoming events or activities which will involve hazing.

Michelle Espinosa replied that students wouldn't share this kind of information with AU, but that the university does communicate regularly with the Greek life community regarding the consequences of hazing and neighborhood disturbances.

Kent Slowinski asked if fraternities and sororities could be moved back onto the AU campus.

Gail Hanson advised that there is no plan to do so. The AU campus plan does not include building fraternity and sorority housing. She then asked the group if the annual postcard sent by AU to residents in the 20016 zip code was useful in helping them report concerns efficiently.

Members of the CLC responded that the information is helpful to have and that an annual mailing is a good idea.

Joe Wisniewski, from Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D, asked if anyone from AU had received a noise complaint from residents at Ward Circle Condominiums, to which AU staff replied they had not.

Jacobs Field Sound Management

David Taylor, Chief of Staff to the President, reported that to mitigate noise on Jacobs Field, several steps have been taken to date including removal of the scoreboard horn, installation of a new sound system with ground level speakers, and regular monitoring of decibel levels along the fence line. He advised that good progress has been made to date and that AU will keep at it.

Neighbor Bob Herzstein (not present) has reported that occasionally game announcers get excited and raise their voices, making sound level an issue. AU has purchased an in-line microphone compressor which equalizes sound distribution. It will be installed and tested in the coming weeks.

Dennis Paul asked if any landscaping can be done around the dish beside Jacobs Field to hide a newly installed fence.

Jerry Gager advised that AU is looking at landscaping around the entire perimeter and that this area also will be looked at.

Transportation Demand Management Study

Dan Nichols, Executive Director of University Safety Programs, updated the CLC on the upcoming Transportation Demand Management (TDM) study aimed at helping AU develop a comprehensive approach to transportation management. He announced that AU has selected Nelson\Nygaard as the project consultant. The firm has extensive experience in the District's neighborhoods and with university transportation issues. He advised that their work will begin soon and likely conclude by the end of November, 2013.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) also will participate in the study.

He continued that AU and Nelson\Nygaard will hold a special CLC meeting in July to gather information on neighborhood transportation concerns.

Tom Smith asked who the Project Manager for the project is, to which Dan Nichols responded, Karina Ricks.

Tom Smith asked about the scope of the TDM and if the study will be internal to the AU campus or also include public streets.

Dan Nichols replied that the study will focus primarily on campus, but also examine the number of single occupancy vehicles which currently come to campus and add to neighborhood traffic.

Tom Smith asked about the status of the TDM plans outlined in the campus plan.

Dan Nichols advised that this study will compliment the plan and its requirements.

Tom Smith asked if the Bender Arena tunnel will be closed.

Dan Nichols responded that this is to be determined and clarified that the TDM is not a traffic engineering study.

Linda Argo added that the TDM request for proposals was clear about the importance of the campus plan and the specific information required in the zoning order.

Beth Marcus, from Sutton Place Condominium Association, asked if the TDM will look at DDOT's proposed bike lane on New Mexico Avenue, NW and advised that neighbors would like to learn more about this proposal.

Dan Nichols responded that while AU wants to encourage biking to campus, the TDM would not take a position on bike lanes, and the report will not specifically advocate for or against them.

Beth Marcus reported incidents of being cut off by AU shuttle buses, witnessing them turning right from the left lane, and sometimes taking up two lanes. She advised that she called the complaint number on the bus and never heard back until speaking with Andrew Huff. She said that shuttle buses are an important face of AU and drivers should be more careful.

Dan Nichols replied that he is in charge of risk management for AU and that these concerns are taken very seriously. He advised that this information has been brought to the attention of the individuals. He continued by stating that the TDM study also will look at AU shuttle bus routes and times.

Judy Chesser asked who is in charge of AU shuttles.

Dan Nichols responded Vin Harkins, the Assistant Vice President of Facilities, manages the AU shuttles.

Dave Fehrmann asked if the TDM also will examine pedestrian traffic.

Dan Nichols replied, yes, to an extent, as the goal is to understand all modes of travel to and from campus, including pedestrian traffic.

Kent Slowinski asked if the TDM will look at students who park in the neighborhood instead of on the AU campus.

Dan Nichols advised that it will and that AU wants to know why they are doing that and what we can do further to encourage them to park on campus.

Greg Ferenbach asked if students are allowed to have cars on campus.

Dan Nichols replied that first-year students only are prohibited from having cars.

Tom Smith advised that Nelson Nygaard submitted testimony to the Zoning Commission and recommended that Dan Nichols take a look at that testimony, to which he responded that he will.

Alcohol Service on Campus

Gail Hanson asked Tom Smith to provide context for his questions for the CLC related to alcohol service on the AU campus.

Tom Smith stated that AU's food service contractor's liquor license is up for renewal and that in the past AU has provided information related to how often and where alcohol is served on campus.

Linda Argo provided the following information to the CLC:

There is no location on campus where alcohol is served on a regular basis, but rather it is served at special events only, and only after approvals by the relevant Dean or a member of the President's Cabinet. Also, alcohol is not sold on campus and is not permitted in AU residence halls.

Only beer and wine service is permitted on campus. In order for beer and wine to be served at a special event, 75 percent of attendees must be 21 years of age or older.

After 12 years, Bon Appétit is the outgoing food service provider on campus and has had exclusive catering rights in the Mary Graydon Center (MGC). Most campus events outside of MGC, by practice not direction, also were catered by Bon Appétit.

An RFP was issued recently and a new contractor was selected, Aramark. The new contract begins June 1, 2013.

In light of this, AU anticipates that Bon Appétit will not renew its liquor license. Aramark will apply for its own license, likely a different class than the license held by Bon Appétit.

Tom Smith asked when AU will find out if Bon Appétit will withdraw its license application.

Linda Argo stated that Bon Appétit will not necessarily notify us of its action.

Tom Smith requested a list of buildings on the AU campus that have been used for functions with alcohol in the last year.

Gail Hanson replied that alcohol service is possible in event space and reiterated that in order for alcohol to be served at an event, a Dean or member of the President's cabinet must approve.

Tom Smith asked if alcohol is sold on campus, to which Linda Argo responded that it is not.

Tom Smith asked if Aramark has exclusive catering rights on campus.

Linda Argo replied that, like Bon Appétit, exclusivity exists only in the Mary Graydon Center.

Jeffrey Kraskin asked what is considered "campus" and if East Campus and the Washington College of Law are included.

Linda Argo responded that these buildings are considered campus.

Tom Smith asked if AU would ask Aramark to exclude the East Campus from the definition of “campus” to make sure no alcohol is served there.

Linda Argo advised that she would take that request back to them.

Gail Hanson stated that the AU board or other executives may have space on the East Campus and receptions likely will take place there, so a blanket policy would be difficult.

Linda Argo asked Tom Smith what his real concern is.

Tom Smith replied that his concern is contracting out space to non-student groups and the use of outdoor patio space as a venue.

Gail Hanson advised that no alcohol would be served outdoors on the East Campus.

Massachusetts Avenue Athletic Field

Gail Hanson stated that a May 18 event on AU’s Massachusetts Avenue playing field resulted in complaints on the CLC list serve. The event was a private function focused on family physical fitness. Traffic, parking, and sound issues were reported and AU staff, as well as Public Safety responded to the scene as soon as they were notified of the complaints.

She went on to explain several rules already in place for the field, including a requirement for renters of the field to park in the Katzen garage and to maintain legal sound levels. She also explained a challenge with access to the field for loading and unloading, which now exists only on the small access road to 46th Street in an area where parking, standing, and drop-off are all prohibited. She asked CLC members for their thoughts and observations related to this challenge.

Jeffery Kraskin replied that there must be a way to pull a vehicle into the gate as opposed to using the lane. He also stated that a big issue is parking enforcement and impeding traffic flow. A recurring issue is the lack of policing to stop people from parking there.

Tom Smith stated that this stretch of Massachusetts Avenue is hazardous due to the speed of vehicles traveling down the street and that parents and children are in the area visiting Turtle Park. He stated that while the zoning order does not prevent AU from renting the space to private entities, laws must be followed.

Gail Hanson said that after issues last year, the Athletics department attached an addendum to the contract dictating where to park, where to cross the street, and standards for sound levels. The majority of users followed these guidelines, but a minority did not. She advised that there also were several baseball games taking place at Turtle Park on this day and that some of these attendees may have contributed to the parking problem as well. She also stated that the Athletics department is willing to add staff to these events to help address parking issues and to monitor sound.

Gail Hanson then addressed the issue of amplified noise, which is rarely used on the field. She reiterated the fact that guidance is given to all users regarding the 60dB limit and stated that AU will add staff to better monitor compliance in the future.

Tom Smith advised that in 30 years, amplified noise has not been a problem at this location. He stated that this particular event was very loud and could be heard indoors.

Gail Hanson replied that several staff went to the location when the complaints were raised and the event organizers were asked to turn down the volume. She stated that AU will continue to work to address this issue. She also advised the CLC that calling MPD and AU Public Safety is the most effective means of addressing these types of issues in a timely fashion.

Greg Ferenbach stated that he could hear the sound from his house, which is a mile away from the field.

Gail Hanson repeated that AU will look closely at the issue and address it.

Mediator Pool Selection

Hisham Khalid, from the AU Office of General Counsel, updated the group on efforts to select mediators. He advised that he, Bill Krebs, and Bob Herzstein have met with four mediators to date and were impressed with them. They will be meeting with two or three others before making a final decision. By the next CLC meeting, a selection should be made.

Gail Hanson thanked those who are working to select mediators.

Neighborhood Course Audit Pilot Program

Andrew Huff advised the group that the Neighborhood Course Audit pilot program will launch in the fall for residents 60 years and older who reside in the 20016 zip code.

Judy Chesser asked if it would only be for those in the 20016 zip code or if it would also be open to members of the CLC.

Andrew Huff responded that AU would consider the request in the future, but that the pilot program is focused on the 20016 zip code at this time.

John Wheeler, of Ward 3 Vision, stated that he spoke to Penny Pagano about this request during the campus plan proceedings and that he is pleased to see AU make such an offering outside of that process.

Proposed Dates for 2013-2014 CLC Meetings

Gail Hanson announced that AU is looking ahead at next year's calendar in an effort to schedule CLC meetings for 2013-2014. She advised that ANC meetings were taken into consideration when selecting the four proposed dates: September 24, December 3, March 4, and June 3.

Kent Slowinski advised that the Palisades Citizens Association usually meets on the first Tuesday of the month and that this might conflict with a CLC date.

Linda Argo stated that only ANC meeting dates were considered when choosing dates due to the high number of civic associations and community groups which meet on a regular basis.

Gail Hanson asked the CLC to please let her know of any major conflicts with these dates.

Good of the Order

Andrew Huff announced an upcoming Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) on June 1 and 2. He asked CLC members to contact him directly if interested.

Gail Hanson called attention to the AU events calendar in the meeting packets.

Dennis Paul asked about the Nebraska Avenue retaining wall and reported that it was deteriorating.

Jerry Gager responded that the wall will be repaired this year and replaced next year.

Dennis Paul advised that the slope on Massachusetts Avenue by the President's office needed trimming beyond the first 2-3 feet. He asked if it can be done now as opposed to waiting until the fall semester begins.

Jerry Gager replied that the landscaping crew will take a look.

Tom Smith inquired about the landscaping plan at Cassell Hall. He asked when the meeting will be held to look over the final plan and see the locations of the soon to be planted trees.

Jerry Gager replied that AU will suggest some meeting dates in the near future.

David Fehrmann asked for an update on the plan to plant a buffer between the East Campus and Westover Place.

Jerry Gager stated that he would get an update on this matter and share it with residents at Westover.

Gail Hanson adjourned the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Attendees

Community:

Judy Chesser, Tenleytown Neighborhood Association

David Fehrmann, Westover Place Homeowners Association

Gregory Ferenbach, Tenley Campus Neighborhood Association

Jeffrey Kraskin, Spring Valley/Wesley Heights Citizens Association

Beth Marcus, Sutton Place Condominium Association

Penny Pagano, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D

Dennis Paul, Neighbors for a Livable Community; Spring Valley/Wesley Heights Citizens Association

Kyle Pitsor, Westover Place Homeowners Association

Alan Pollock, Ft. Gaines Citizens Association

Kathy Silva, McLean Gardens
Kent Slowinski, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D
Tom Smith, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D; Spring Valley/Wesley Heights Citizens Association
Jane Waldmann, Tenleytown Historical Society
Nan Wells, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D
John Wheeler, Ward 3 Vision

American University Staff:

Linda Argo, Assistant Vice President for External Relations & Auxiliary Services
David Dower, Assistant Vice President for Facilities Development & Real Estate
Michelle Espinosa, Associate Dean of Students
Jerry Gager, University Architect
Gail Hanson, Vice President of Campus Life
Andrew Huff, Director of Community Relations
Hisham Khalid, Office of the General Counsel
Phil Morse, Senior Director of Public Safety and Emergency Management
Dan Nichols, Executive Director of University Safety Programs
David Taylor, Chief of Staff to the President

American University Students:

Rory Slatko, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D
Joe Wisniewski, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 3D